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MEN AND BOOKS

Sir Andrew Macphail, 1864-1938

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CONFEDERATION was accomplished in London, England, in 1867; but it had been cradled in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, in 1864. The centenary of *that* event was celebrated in Charlottetown in 1964, in part by a meeting of the Royal Society of Canada which I attended.

The year 1864 also saw the birth, about a score of miles from Charlottetown, in the village of Orwell, of a baby boy about whom I would write—not a biography but an essay, in which I may say what I want to say and no more. That baby came to be known as Sir Andrew Macphail, and his favourite form of writing was the essay.

Macphail's father, William, was brought from the north of Scotland by his parents in 1832. They were headed for Montreal; but, being shipwrecked on Prince Edward Island, they got no farther. William became a schoolmaster in Orwell, later Inspector of Schools, and finally Supervisor of the Hospital for the Insane at Charlottetown. His son Andrew was schooled at Orwell; then a scholarship took him to the Prince of Wales College, Charlottetown. Never did he cease to cherish the memory of his family life at Orwell; the family home remained his throughout his life. For his children he wrote an autobiography, mostly of his early days, entitled "The Master's Wife". It was published posthumously and privately by his children. "The Master" was his father; "The Master's Wife" was of course his mother; and the book was dedicated to his son and daughter. It gives a vivid picture of life and thought in the Scottish settlements on Prince Edward Island about the time of Confederation and shortly thereafter. One quotation must suffice: "My first experience of coffee was in the minister's house. His wife was a foreign woman, that is, from Nova Scotia. She gave me a cup; and the strange exotic flavour and fragrance gave entrance into a new world."

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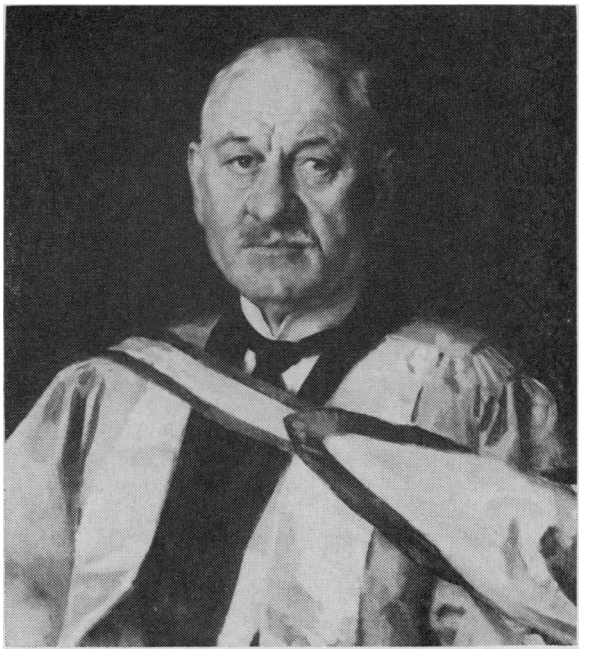

Fig. 1.—Sir Andrew Macphail.

At the time of the 1964 celebrations in Charlottetown I wandered into the Prince of Wales College to see if perchance there were any visible memorial to Macphail. There was. In the main lobby I saw a plaque bearing this inscription:

SIR ANDREW MACPHAIL, O.B.E.
Founder and editor of "The University Magazine".
Friend of literary genius: "This means more to Canada than a new province."
His literary and critical essays raised the standard of Canadian Literature and won for him international notice.
Born at Orwell, 24th November, 1864.
Died in Montreal, 23rd September, 1938.
Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada.

Excellent though this is, it struck me at once that it does not indicate that Macphail was a medical man, nor that for many years he was the distinguished Professor of the History of Medicine at McGill University, and one of

Canada's most scholarly physicians. To his medical career we now turn.

After teaching school on "The Island" for several years, Macphail entered McGill. He graduated in arts in 1888 and in medicine in 1891. During his student days he was a reporter for the Montreal *Gazette*. Not only did this inaugurate his literary career; together with some tutoring, it led to his graduating in medicine with twelve hundred dollars in hand! This took him around the world. A year at The London Hospital led to the M.R.C.S., L.R.C.P. Upon returning to Montreal he became Professor of Pathology at Bishop's College, and later pathologist to the Western Hospital and to the Verdun Hospital. When McGill absorbed the Medical Faculty of Bishop's College in 1907, Macphail was made Professor of the History of Medicine at McGill. It was there that I knew him, during my years in the Department of Anatomy.

MACPHAIL AS EDITOR

Macphail's scholarship and literary skill led to the editorial chairs of the *University Magazine*, the *Montreal Medical Journal* and *The Canadian Medical Association Journal;* these he filled with great distinction. Editorial experience evidently inspired the following passage in his essay on John McCrae:[1] McCrae "was the first to recognize that an editor has some rights and prejudices, that certain words make him sick; that certain other words he reserves for his own use, —'meticulous' once a year, 'adscititious' once in a life time. This explains why editors write so little. In the end, out of mere good nature, or seeing the futility of it all, they contribute their words to contributors and write no more." I cannot refrain from mentioning that I can show that Macphail himself used "adscititious" thrice in his lifetime! Concerning his editorial fastidiousness the late Dr. W. W. Francis,[2] librarian of the Osler Library, relates the following: "His respect for words was uncompromising. Once when leaving for his Island home he handed me some papers for the Journal, with instructions to alter the title of one by a prominent surgeon. 'The scaphoid abdomen, yes; the pendulous abdomen, yes; but 'The acute abdomen'—*no!*' I feared the surgeon more than the editor, and left it angular."

At this point a trifling experience of my own may be mentioned. In 1927 I published in *The Canadian Medical Association Journal* (of which Macphail was no longer editor) a short paper entitled "Remarks on the Deep Muscles of the Back, with Reference to Infantile Paralysis". To my surprise I received a charming commendatory note from Macphail, concluding: "I seemed to understand what I was reading."

HIS BOOKS

In 1893 Macphail married Miss Georgina Borland of Montreal. They had a son and a daughter. In 1902 Mrs. Macphail died. We can sense the deep effect of this bereavement from one of his books, "The Book of Sorrow".[3] Of those known to me, this is completely unlike all his other publications. It is a considerable anthology of poetry dealing with death and grief. It was not published until 1916, when Macphail was serving in France. The preface contains the following: "For many civil years it was a melancholy pleasure assembling these pieces and placing them in order. Now, there is ample warrant for completing the task and offering as a comfort to other hearts what in the outset was designed for private luxury." Of the poems in this collection, five are by Andrew Macphail, and two are by John McCrae.

After the war, Macphail published another atypical book—an English translation of the novel "Maria Chapdelaine" by the French author Louis Hémon.[4] Here is evident not only his mastery of the French tongue but also his understanding of the lives of the pioneer French Canadians. The illustrations are by Suzor-Coté.

Macphail published four volumes of historical essays. "Three Persons" deals with the 1914-18 war, and will receive further notice in that connection. The other volumes are: "Essays in Puritanism", "Essays in Politics", and "Essays in Fallacy".

The "Essays in Puritanism"[5] comprise five biographical essays, only two of which seem to me to deal with typical Puritans. I found his sequel, "The Vine of Sibmah",*[6] much more interesting; it is a virile historical novel of high adventure in the seventeenth century, amongst Cavaliers, Roundheads, Puritans and Quakers, both in England and in New England. His "Essays in Politics",[7] 10 in number, deal with the political history of Canada, especially her relationships with Great Britain and with the United States. Of particular interest are his discussions concerning the boundary disputes with the United States.

In 1910 Macphail published his "Essays in Fallacy".[8] Here the reader experiences Macphail's mature writing, historical and literary knowledge, and critical insight, especially in the last two chapters, dealing respectively with "The Fallacy in Education" and "The Fallacy in Theology". The latter is twice as long as the

*Concerning Sibmah see Josh. 13: 19.

Canad. Med. Ass. J.
Jan. 6, 1968, vol. 98

former, and many might find it twice as interesting. The chapter on education makes excellent reading today, but he hardly mentions medical education. His views on that matured for a further 16 years, finding expression in an address to the American College of Surgeons in 1926 on "American Methods in Medical Education".[9] Those who are convinced that Canadian medical schools can do no better than to follow American methods in medical education are advised not to read that address! It seems to me that the chapter on "The Fallacy in Theology" has its sequel in his book "The Bible in Scotland";[10] but I must admit that from it I learned much more about the Bible than I did about Scotland! Macphail's great book on the war is referred to below.

HISTORY OF MEDICINE

Macphail's profound knowledge of the history of medicine pervades and illumines many of his writings. Perhaps his chief publication devoted exclusively to this was his address to the American College of Physicians in 1933 on "The Source of Modern Medicine".[11] After more than 30 years it still makes stimulating reading.

HIS WAR WRITINGS

The 1914-18 war evoked what I consider Macphail's most outstanding writings. They were not numerous, but they were born of great knowledge, experience and feeling. Part of his military career is well summarized in the obituary notice in *The Canadian Medical Association Journal*.[12] I quote from it: "In April of 1916, Dr. Macphail determined to follow his only son to the front. He enlisted as a lieutenant with No. 6 Field Ambulance, and had much to do with its organization, equipment, and the securing of suitable personnel. Proceeding to the front, Dr. Macphail was in the thick of the severe fighting in which the Canadians were engaged in 1916 and 1917, including the battle of Vimy Ridge." For his military services he was awarded the O.B.E. and a knighthood.

In my mind Macphail's writings about the war fall into three groups, here arranged not chronologically but (I trust) logically.

In 1929 appeared his volume of essays entitled "Three Persons".[13] The three were: Field-Marshal Sir Henry Wilson, Colonel E. M. House and Colonel T. E. Lawrence. The first two essays are fascinating discussions of British and American personalities responsible for conducting the war, and of how vital decisions were made.

Dealing specifically with the Canadian Medical Services are: his Cavendish Lecture on "A Day's Work", a paper on "An Ambulance in Rest" and the "Official History of the Canadian Forces in the Great War 1914-19, The Medical Services".

On Easter Monday, April 9, 1917, was fought the battle of Vimy Ridge. Macphail with his field ambulance was in the midst of it. In June the War Office recalled him to London to deliver the Cavendish Lecture. This he did on June 22, 1917. He called it "A Day's Work"; it was published in *The Lancet*.[14] Restraining myself, I shall simply state my opinion that it should be required reading as a medical supplement to other accounts of the battle of Vimy Ridge. One can imagine the feelings with which, before that wartime London audience, he made the following anonymous reference to Orwell and to his son: "In a place so remote that many of you have never heard its name the alarm of war reached us 24 hours after it had sounded. A boy was sitting beside me reading a book. He laid down the book and walked a little way. . . . The boy came back and said, 'I think I will go to the war.' 'Tonight or in the morning?' I asked. 'In the morning,' he said. He went away in the morning."

Between the battles of Vimy Ridge and the Somme, No. 6 Canadian Field Ambulance enjoyed a brief rest at the town of Boolezele. In September 1917 Macphail published in the *British Medical Journal* a sequel to "A Day's Work"; he called it "An Ambulance in Rest".[15] The contrast between work and rest as a soldier experiences them, and especially between army food and French cuisine, is depicted with his peculiar literary skill. Here is his account of their last dinner before returning to the front. "That day a motor ambulance went to St. Omer on its usual business; we were to move in the morning. The driver brought back certain things from the market, and there were four persons at table. That evening the old order passed away. Again there were pears from the garden. There was a mackerel—cooked as no fish ever had the honour of being cooked, *à la meunière*, as the miller's wife cooks a fish, with brown butter and parsley. There were two young chickens from a nearby farm, and lettuce so living that the leaf complained aloud before it took the oil. Also there was wine of Burgundy and contentment."

Macphail's *magnum opus* was his "Official History of the Canadian Forces in the Great War, 1914-19, The Medical Services", published in Ottawa in 1925.[16] There are 402 pages of medical historical writing that in my opinion could have been penned by no other person. It

is an extraordinary combination of facts and figures, historical comments and comparisons, and very deep thoughts. The medical arrangements in most preceding wars seem to be touched upon, as are the shortcomings of some of the high and mighty. Dr. Francis[2] quotes Macphail as having written this book ". . . as though everyone . . . in it were dead. I have found that they were not dead." Concerning a suggested scheme of promotions in the medical service of the American Army he writes: "This paper roster would in itself be a perfect academic curiosity; but the 'best' man might be the very worst that could be assigned to a particular post. Sir William Osler, for example, would rank very high on the list; he could command a hospital, or with lucidity and charm explain to an advance party how it came about that the rum-jar contained only lime-juice; but he might not acquit himself very well in extricating an ambulance-wagon from a ditch."

I cannot refrain from quoting a few thoughts of so distinguished an historian. "History is the master to which all must go—history with its pensive and melancholy face." "History is something more than a manual of dates and a store of facts. These must be displayed with a design that they become a subject of meditation; they must be followed where they lead. . . . Historical and political issues cannot be dissevered from the persons concerned in their creation. The historian is to disclose the issue, leaving the persons by their words and actions to disclose themselves."

Arising out of the war is Macphail's "Essay in Character" on John McCrae,[1] the Canadian physician now best known as the author of the poem *In Flanders Fields,* first published anonymously in *Punch,* December 8, 1915. McCrae died in France on January 28, 1918, and Macphail's essay is significantly dated London, November 11, 1918. When the poem appeared Macphail immediately recognized McCrae's poetry, and wrote him so; because for some years McCrae had contributed all his published verse to the *University Magazine,* of which Macphail was editor; moreover, deep friendship between them had ripened during McCrae's years in Montreal.

Macphail relates how in 1905 McCrae offered a poem *The Pilgrims,* for the *University Magazine.* Among McCrae's papers Macphail found his own letter of acceptance, part of which he quotes, and I repeat, because it is so characteristic. "It is the real stuff of poetry. How did you make it? What have you to do with medicine? I was charmed with it: the thought high, the image perfect, the expression complete; not too reticent, not too full. Videntes autem stellam gavisi sunt gaudio magno valde. In our own tongue—'slainte filidh'." To his mother, McCrae wrote: "The Latin is translatable as 'seeing the star they rejoiced with exceeding gladness'." Then comes a characteristic Macphailian touch: "For the benefit of those whose education has proceeded no further than the Latin, it may be explained that the two last words mean, 'Hail to the poet'."

Macphail's account of his first meeting with John McCrae's father is again highly characteristic. In June 1917 Macphail was on leave in London to deliver the Cavendish Lecture. On a Sunday evening he strolled down to the river Thames. "A man of middle age was standing by. He wore the flashings of a Lieutenant-Colonel and for badges the Artillery grenades. He seemed a friendly man; and under the influence of the moment, which he also surely felt, I spoke to him.

'A fine river,'—That was a safe remark.

'But I know a finer.'

'Pharpar and Abana?' I put the stranger to the test.*

'No,' he said. 'The St. Lawrence is not of Damascus.' He had answered to the sign, and looked at my patches.

'I have a son in France myself,' he said. 'His name is McCrae.'

'Not John McCrae?'

'John McCrae is my son.'"

Finally, here is one of Macphail's comments on the poem: "It is little wonder then that *In Flanders Fields* has become the poem of the army. The soldiers have learned it with their hearts, which is quite a different thing from committing it to memory."

CONCLUSION

I omit listing the numerous honours and distinctions that came to Macphail; and I know better than to attempt to characterize such a man. I am leaving him by his words and actions to disclose himself; hence the number of quotations in this essay. Stephen Leacock[17] has given the best character sketch that I have come across; from this I quote: "Andrew seemed so different to other men that his presence seemed to lift an occasion out of the commonplace. Introduced to strangers, he made an instant impression. Those of us who had to entertain, in public or in private, a visiting celebrity at once sent for Andrew: just as one sends for the doctor; and no celebrity could 'celebrity' him. He treated them as a man used

*II Kings, 5:12.

Canad. Med. Ass. J.
Jan. 6, 1968, vol. 98

to horses treats a new one. It always seemed amazing that he could handle them so easily. Rudyard Kipling came to Montreal. Andrew had him tamed in half an hour, took him over to his house and then put him upstairs to write a speech. 'Has Kipling come?' asked a next entering visitor, in the awestruck tones we used for celebrities in the days before the Great War gave us our own. 'He's upstairs,' Andrew said, 'I told him he ought to *write* his speech for McGill; he's writing it.' From this beginning, incidentally, dated the long friendship, the mutual service and the mutual esteem of these two men."

In his obituary appreciation of Macphail,[12] the Dean of the Faculty of Medicine at McGill, the late Dr. C. F. Martin, declared: "He hid his generous deeds as most men hide their sins." A few weeks before his death Macphail wrote wistfully: ". . . The world becomes more beautiful as the time for leaving it comes near."

At the end of this Centennial Year, when

"The tumult and the shouting dies;
The captains and the kings depart:"

what recognition will have been granted to one who contributed so notably to the scholarly reputation of Canadian medicine during the century since Confederation?

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